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MILTON IN RUSTICATION¹

BY E. K. RAND

How well you tell of your high feastings, of your Saturnalian merriment!—How well you tell of the joys of winter in the country, and of the strong must quaffed by the jolly fireside! But why do you complain that poetry is a runaway from wining and dining? Song loves Bacchus, and Bacchus loves song. Apollo was not ashamed to wear the green clusters, nay even to put the ivy of the wine-god above his own laurel. Many a time the nine Muses have mixed with the Bacchic chorus crying *Euoe* on the Heliconian hills. Those verses which Ovid sent from the fields of Thrace were bad, because there were no feasts there and no vineyards. What but roses and the grape-laden vine did Anacreon sing in those tiny staves of his? Teumesian Bacchus inspired Pindar's strain; each page of his breathes ardor from the drained cup, as he sings of the crash of the heavy chariot overturned, and the rider flying by, dark with the dust of the Elean race-course. The Roman lyrist drank first of the four-year-old vintage, ere he sang so sweetly of Glycera and blond-haired Chloe. The sinews of your genius, too, draw strength from the nobly laden table. Your Massic cups foam with a rich vein of song; you pour bottled verses straight from the jar.

What roistering bard is this? The Latin elegiacs of which I have read a translation breathe a spirit of Horace and Ovid; they might be proudly claimed by either of those vinous souls and polished poets. As both of them are mentioned, the author of these lines lived after their time. Here is how his Latin sounds,—I cite the closing verses of the passage, beginning with what he says of Horace:

Quadrimoque madens lyricen Romanus Iaccho
Dulce canit Glyceran flavicomamque Chloen.

¹This paper was read in part at a meeting of the Philological Society of the University of North Carolina on February 7, 1922.

Iam quoque lauta tibi generoso mensa paratu
Mentis alit vires, ingeniumque fovet.
Massica foecundam despumant pocula venam,
Fundis et ex ipso condita metra cado.

Such verse, you will admit, has the right flavor; it smacks of a mellow and an ancient vintage. Who could have written it, if we must exclude Horace and Ovid? It is very like the latter author; he would willingly have slipped the poem into one of his little books,—possibly emending the remark about his own bad verses. What of Martial? He could turn out a poem in any style, depending on the taste of his patron. But I have somewhat falsified the text. Consult the original and you will see that our poet is describing not the Saturnalia but Christmas. His feasters sip French wine, by an English fireside. We are many centuries remote from Horace and Ovid and Martial. The Middle Ages have passed. So has the Renaissance; or rather it has reached the consummation of its revived and Classical art in the writer of these verses, John Milton.

Those of you who had not thought of the Puritan Milton as one of the best poetical consolers for thirsty wanderers in the great American Sahara, I hope are properly surprised. The reason may be that you have paid less attention to his Latin poems than to those in our own tongue. Milton was only twenty-one when he penned the verses I have quoted. He sent them to his best of friends, Charles Diodati, a young Englishman of Italian parentage. Though the imagery of the poem is antique, it talks about concerns of the moment,—the poet's friend and his pleasures, and the verses which they have interchanged. Diodati had vowed that he could not write poetry because he was having such a good time in the Christmas holidays. Milton, in a pretty vein of banter, replies with a sentiment frequently expressed by the ancient poets, "My dear fellow, you forget. The old bards were always mellow from deep potion before they ventured to put pen to paper. You ought under present circumstances to be polishing off something exceptionally fine." He then goes on to tell of his own plans and of the far different inspiration on which a writer of high poetry, as distinguished from the sort that he was writing then, needed to draw. This is a prelude to the announcement of a poem in English on which he was then at work and which was to contain little of Ovid. We will return to it later.

For the most part, Milton is a young Ovid at the time when he wrote the lines that I have quoted. One of his poems describes the coming of spring (*Eleg. v.*). It is Pagan from beginning to end, joyous in spirit, sensuous in flavor, perfect in form. Really if Milton had written it on musty parchment and had somebody discover it, the Classical pundits of his day would have proved beyond question by all the tests of scholarship that a lost work of Ovid had come to light. So with most of the other pieces that he collected into a tiny book of "elegies." To write them, he must have known his Ovid virtually by heart, not merely the *Metamorphoses*, which then and now make the best possible introduction to the world of romance and human charm preserved in the old Greek myths, but all the poems of Ovid, *Fasti* and *Ibis* as well as the poor verses of lamentation poured forth on the shores of the Black Sea, and of course, as Milton is writing elegy, the love poems, *Amores*, with *Heroides* and the *Art of Love*. The imitation is of the subtlest kind. There were no scientific works accessible in Milton's time, as there are now, on Ovid's versification, with imposing tables of statistics in which you can find the percentage of dactyls in any foot of the verse. It was a primitive age; our youthful poet had merely absorbed all the niceties of Ovid's art without cataloguing them. In looking back over these years, Milton speaks of the "smooth Elegiack Poets, whereof the Schools are not scarce. Whom, both for the pleasing sound of their numerous (=melodious) writing, which in imitation I found most easie, and most agreeable to natures part in me, and for their matter, which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allur'd to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome."²

But let none imagine that the experiences, real or imaginary, recorded in Milton's Latin poems, match those of Ovid. In his nearest approach to an Ovidian episode, he describes his youthful contempt of Cupid and tells how the winged god took revenge on him one bright Mayday in his nineteenth year. Here is what befell him. (*Eleg. vii*, 51 ff.)

And now I took my pleasure, sometimes in the city parks, where our citizens promenade, sometimes at neighboring country-places. Crowds of girls, with faces like to the faces of goddesses, came and went radiantly

² *An Apology . . . (for) Smectymnuus*, in *Works*, Ed. Pickering, 1851, vol. III, p. 269.

through the walks; the day brightened with a double splendor. Surely, the sun himself stole his beams from their faces. I was not stern with myself; I did not flee from the gracious spectacle, but let myself be led wherever youthful impulse directed. Rashly I sent my gaze to meet theirs; I could not control my eyes. Then by chance I noted one supreme above the others, and the light of her eyes was the beginning of my ills. She looked as Venus might wish to seem to mortals; lovely to behold as the queen of the gods was she. That rascal Cupid, harboring his grudge, had thrown her in my path; all alone, he had woven this plot against me. Not far off the sly god was hiding; his torch and many arrows hung as a great load from his back. Not a moment did he lose. Now he clung to her eyelids, now to her virgin face; thence he hopped upon her lips, and now he occupied her cheeks; and wherever the nimble archer went, ah, me! from a thousand points of vantage he struck my defenceless breast. Suddenly unwonted furies assailed my heart; I burned inly with love, I was all aflame. Meanwhile she who was my only delight in misery disappeared, never to be given to my eyes again.³

This is after all a tolerably harmless experience,—he spies a pretty girl in his promenade, falls desperately in love, and, ah, me! never beholds the fair creature thereafter. Ovid is often tantalizing, but never to this extent.

Perhaps you think that I am too long in getting at my subject,—Milton's rustication. I can plead in excuse that the prelude is part of the play. For it is in the first of these Ovidian pieces (*Eleg. 1*) that Milton tells how he was rusticated; no less sure in art and in sentiment than its successors, this poem was written when the lad was but seventeen. I will read you part of it. It was sent to Charles Diodati.

At last, my dear friend, your letter has reached me; the missive paper bears me your words from the western shore of the Dee, by Chester, where that river goes down swiftly to the Irish Sea. Much joy it gives me to think that a far-off country keeps for me so dear a head as yours, and a heart that loves me; and that this distant region owes me my merry mate, aye, and will soon repay him at my prayers. That city which Thames washes with her tidal wave, keeps me fast, nor does my pleasant birth-place detain me against my will; I have no wish to go back to reedy Cam; I feel no homesickness for that forbidden college room of mine. The bare fields there, niggard of pleasant shade, do not attract me. How ill does that place suit with poets! I have no fancy to endure

³ The translations of Milton's Latin poems given in this paper are from the admirable version (slightly revised) by William Vaughan Moody in the Cambridge Edition of Milton.

forever my stern master's threats or any of those other actions at which my nature rebelled. If this is "exile," to live under my father's roof and be free to use my leisure pleasantly, I will not repudiate either the outcast's name or lot but will in all happiness enjoy this state of banishment. Oh would that Ovid, sad exile in the fields of Thrace, had never suffered a worse lot! Then he would have yielded not a whit even to Ionian Homer, nor would the first praise be thine, Virgil, for he would have vanquished thee.

He then speaks of the joy of his freedom, freedom to bury himself in his books, which he calls his very life, and freedom to see whatever appears on the stage; it is hard to tell from his words whether he means the actual theatre of his day or merely his reading in the ancient drama. I think he means both, now giving stock examples from the ancient stage, now suggesting modern plays by ancient examples, and now referring to what could come only from a modern play.⁴

Then there are the walks in town or country, and the fair visions that brighten these promenades.

Ah, how often have I stood stupefied before the miracle of some gracious form, such as might give old Jove his youth again! Ah, how many times have I seen eyes brighter than gems, brighter than all the fires that roll about either pole, necks whiter than the ivory shoulder of Pelops or the Milky Way that flows with pure nectar. And exquisite grace of brow, and floating locks,—golden nets which Love casts deceptively,—inviting cheeks, to which—even the blush of thy flower, Adonis, is dull! Yield, ye Heroines so praised of yore, and all ye loves that ensnared gadding Jove! Yield ye Persian damsels with your turreted brows; and all ye who dwell in Susa, in Memnon's Ninevah!—And let not Ovid boast the dames of Pompey's porch, nor the theatre resplendent with fashionable gowns. To the maidens of Britain first glory is due; suffice it, foreign dame, that thou canst follow them! And thou city of London, built by Trojan colonists, thy towered head conspicuous far and wide, thou, all too happy, enclosest with thy walls whatever beauty the pendulous Earth possesses. Not so many stars twinkle over thee in the clear night sky, ministrant troops of Endymion's goddess, as through thy highways throng troops of girls, bright with beauty and with gold, drawing all eyes with their radiance.

This encomium of British beauty is suddenly succeeded by the

⁴The "lawyer, pregnant with a ten-years' suit, thundering barbarous words before an ignorant court" does not correspond to anything that I can recall in ancient comedy.

unexpected conclusion that he will leave these halls of Circe the deceiver, for he is permitted after all,

to go back to the bulrush swamps of Cam, and to the raucous murmur of the school.

We do not know the reason for Milton's rustication. The same mystery hangs about it as about Ovid's exile. *Crimen et error* explains the latter event, according to its victim; whatever the *crimen* and the *error* were, the confession of them indicates the exile's repentance. Not so with young Milton; the blame attaches not to him but to the pedagogue, hard of heart and sense, who had presumed to interfere with his scheme of living.

I will now for a moment descend suddenly to our own times, and ask you to imagine what sort of an epistle would be written by a college Freshman to his best friend from a state of rustication, if the Administrative Board will allow us, in New York. The average Freshman today is over seventeen, but on that detail we need not dwell. It is tolerably certain that he would not send a missive of Latin elegiacs in the best manner of Ovid. The theme might include some of the same points, such as the delights of city life, the freedom of the writer to indulge in his favorite pursuit (though this would not necessarily be reading), constant attendance at dramatic exhibitions (perhaps different in character from those that interested Milton, though one of the ancient varieties, the *fabula motoria*, might appeal), and finally, a sincere panegyric of the fair sex in general and American girls in particular. I can imagine such an outline; the filling would be nothing recondite or exotic; the language would be a simple and exceedingly contemporaneous species of the vernacular.

Whether or not it is desirable that undergraduates today should be young Miltons, it is plain that our youth are fed on a different literary staple from that which was regarded as indispensable in the seventeenth century. Of course Milton was a prodigy. He doubtless had read more than any youth of his acquaintance. Still, his acquaintances had all had essentially the same training. Charles Diodati, so far as we know, was not a genius, but an average college man. Milton would not have polished off Latin verses for him, or read those that Diodati sent in reply, had not that seemed a natural and intelligible mode of communication for two college friends.

Ovid was by no means the only Classic with whom Milton was familiar as an undergraduate. Echoes of Virgil and Horace, of Lucretius and Persius are no less apparent to the reader of his early verses, whether Latin or English. He was as deep in Greek literature; indeed it is sometimes said, though one would not gather this from his verse, that his chief models were the Greeks rather than the Romans. He knew the English classics, too,—Chaucer and Spenser and Shakespeare; and of course he knew his Bible. These diverse elements he combined in that finely hybrid culture which has always been the essence of Christian humanism. How much of this he had gained from his tutors, particularly Thomas Young,⁵ before coming to college it were rash to guess; but whatever the acquisitions from year to year, his education is all of a piece.

In reading his ancients, Milton did not merely feast his soul with indiscriminate pleasure; he studied their art in its larger outlines and in its smallest traits. A line like

Orgia cantantes in Echionio Aracyntho⁶

shows that he is aware, in his seventeenth year, that Virgil allowed Greek words at the end of a verse a certain metrical liberty,—a spondee in the fifth foot, or a hiatus there, or a short syllable under the ictus, or all of these licenses in a general riot; when the glorious Greeks got into a Roman verse, they broke the rules (with Virgil's kind permission). Milton has studied, and he illustrates in his own adaptation, the principles that govern elegy and epigram, ode and epode, and the short epic known as epyllion. He gives us Catullan choliambics, and later, just after the publication of his minor poems in 1645, he writes an ode to Rouse, the librarian of the Bodleian, which is a rarity in Latin versification. It imitates, with a not wholly serious intent, the glorious freedom and glorious formalism, of a Greek chorus, with strophies and antistrophies, changing metres and occasional free verse; I use this latter term advisedly, as it translates Milton's description,—*metra partim sunt κατὰ σχέσιν partim ἀπολελυμένα*. The best way to get its effect in English is not to read Cowley's translation, but to chop up Mr. Moody's prose translation,—in which no unpoetical element can be found—into

⁵ See *Eleg.* iv.

⁶ *Sylv.* ii, 65.

free verse, as Professor Lowes⁷ once chopped up the prose of George Meredith into free verse. I wonder if the Ode to Rouse has been used in connection with the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*? I wonder if sufficient allowance has been made there for choriamb, and for free verse?

Satire is a field in which Milton, like Virgil and Lucretius, might have excelled; like Virgil and Lucretius, he does not develop it as a form in itself, but keeps it for incidental flavorings. Buchanan had shown that a most pungent variety of Latin satire could be concocted from ancient elements for the benefit of modern sinners, including the Franciscans. Milton works this vein in one of the most powerful of his poems, that on Guy Fawkes' Day (*Sylv.* ii), but in structure it is an epyllion, a mock-epyllion, rather than satire.

In his imitations, the young poet does not hesitate to cross swords with his distinguished predecessors. He invades their very sanctuaries and does over again what one would imagine they had already done very well. The ordinary way to imitate, for instance, Ovid's House of Fame or Cave of Sleep, would be to build some other house or cave somewhere else like Claudian's Cave of the Ages, or Cave of History,⁸ or that which Cowley builds in Hell,⁹ or most habitable of all these caves, Pope's Cave of Dulness. But Milton, undeterred even by Chaucer, has his own House of Fame (*Sylv.* ii, 170). It inevitably suggests Ovid, and it lacks the incomparable grace and fluency with which in Ovid's picture each image glides, before you know it, into the current of the verse. Milton is less at ease, but his picture is striking, and for all its borrowed details, his own.

There are blemishes in the work of the young poet, some of them occasioned by his very audacity. He thus pictures Dame Rumor:¹⁰

Throned on high sits Rumor herself; about her head grow innumerable ears, by whose aid she gathers in the slightest sound, the lightest murmur, from the ends of the earth. More eyes she has than thou, Argus, unjust

⁷ See his *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, p. 219, and on the free character of "the great strophic rhythms" of *Paradise Lost*, p. 259.

⁸ *De Laude Stilichonis*, ii, end.

⁹ *Davideis* i, § 8.

¹⁰ *Sylv.* ii, 181.

keeper of the cow Io, eyes that never close in sleep, but continually look abroad over the lands beneath; with them she is wont to search through places void of light, impervious even to the sun's rays. With a thousand tongues she pours out in unconsidering speech to any chance comer all that she sees or hears, now making less the truth, now swelling it with imagined fabrications.

This is not a picture that easily lends itself to the imagination. Virgil's goddess¹¹ has under all the feathers on her dreadful body as many eyes and tongues and rising ears. We can see the feathers as on any bird, and we can accept the marvel that the feathers are endowed with most unusual properties, but we are not asked to see the eyes and ears and tongues, still less to count them. Virgil and Homer sometimes wish that they had a hundred tongues, but happily for their powers of description, their wish is never gratified. Acuteness of vision is not multiplied proportionately to the number of the organs thereof. Fertility is better symbolized by the bountiful Earth-goddess on the frieze of the Ara Pacis than by the excessive alimentary equipment of Diana of Ephesus.

If any one desires to see *all* the defects of Milton's Latinity and Classical imagery, one has only to consult the notes of the careful Keightley, who with a housewifely solicitude peers into every line and sweeps up whatever is not quite proper there. He points out that Sirens should *not* be called nymphs¹² and that the phrase "to mix a bowl" (*poculum miscere*)¹³ is sadly unclassical for at least two reasons. On both charges, Milton could have instructed his critics as to what Classical, and specifically, Ovidian, usage is,¹⁴ but I mention them as a tribute to Keightley's conscientiousness. It is the same Keightley that collected the "incongruities" of Virgil.

The writing of Latin verse, for men of Milton's time, was more than a kind of laboratory practice in Latin grammar and prosody. It was not produced, like most Latin verse today, in anguish of the spirit and perspiration of the flesh. We have abandoned that elegant exercise, and wonder at the vogue that it had until not very long ago in England. In Milton's day it was a natural part

¹¹ *Aen.* iv, 181.

¹² *Epig. ad Eandem (Leonoram)*, Cambridge Edition, p. 345.

¹³ *Eleg.* vii, 22.

¹⁴ On the first, cf. Ovid's general use of *nymphae* (*Her.* i, 27; ix, 103; xvi, 128). *Misceri pocula* occurs in *Ibis* 297.

of any lad's education, for the reason that it was a legacy from the Italian humanists. Italy had never forgotten what had taken place on its own soil; the contemporaries of Dante and Petrarch regarded Virgil as their ancestor, who spoke their own tongue, even as we think of Chaucer, despite the changes that language has undergone. John Addington Symonds remarks of the Latin poetry of the Renaissance:¹⁵

For Italians, the *Camoenae* had not died; on the hills of Latium where they fell asleep, they might wake again. Every familiar sight and sound recalled 'the rich Virgilian rustic measure' of the *Georgics* and *Bucolics*.

The Latin verse of Pontano and Sannazaro was no labored effort; it was as natural and as native an expression as Italian. They were bilingual, *utriusque linguae periti*, like George DuMaurier, Professor Lane, and Marcus Aurelius. Milton's residence, the abiding-place of his youthful spirit, was Italy quite as much as England. To quote his words,—and here again we must go to the Latin poems for them:¹⁶

London-bred Milton, a while ago left his nest and his accustomed tract of sky, where the worst of winds fills all beneath Jove's canopy, panting wild blasts from lungs ungovernable; and he came to the fruitful glebe of Italy, to see its proud cities, its noble men, and its gifted youth.

Italy was to Milton as to Browning and to any lover of it, a land of sunshine and romance, gay with the present and solemn with the reminiscence of what he calls "buried Rome." He took his very hand-writing from Italy. The autograph of one of his Latin poems is preserved; the script resembles rather closely—*horribile dictu*—that of his Holiness Pope Julius II.¹⁷ Small wonder that what seemed natural for an Italian poet seemed natural to Milton. He turned out some very respectable Italian verses, and he wrote Latin poetry as in his own tongue.

I have referred to some of the qualities of Milton's Latin poetry. To appreciate the completeness of his success, we must consider for a moment with a bit more care, the nature of the undertaking. It is not enough merely to write decent Latin verse on some ancient

¹⁵ *Renaissance in Italy*, II (1898), p. 324.

¹⁶ *Ad Salsillum*, Cambridge Edit., p. 363.

¹⁷ See E. K. Rand, "J and T in Milton's Latin Script," in *Modern Philology*, xix (1922), pp. 315 ff.

or, preferably, contemporary theme with due attention to proper vocabulary and the proper place of longs and shorts. That is a considerable task, but the real exertion comes in the imitation. All art is imitative, as Plato and Aristotle observed, and yet perpetually new. A Latin poet of the Renaissance or of Milton's times was bound to play the game according to the rules. He must possess traditional art as well as inspiration,—what Statius calls a *doctus furor*¹⁸—madness accompanied by method. He must season his verse with the antique, but avoid too obvious reminiscences, sheer steals. Steal one must, and yet not without detection. It is the kind of robbery that justifies the robber and makes him rightful owner. Or, shall I say? one must be detected in the manner of Fielding's heroines, indubitably detected, but quite as indubitably virtuous. And not only words and images and turns of thought must be stolen from antiquity, but the flavor, the atmosphere. Substances inconsistent with one another must be combined harmoniously. Cowley, for instance, throws things together that blend no better than oil and water. He is the poet of conceits, and in English he is often best when he is boldest. But the conceits in his Latin verse,—strangely, perhaps, for Ovid is also expert in conceits and helps Cowley to some of his—are unsuccessful, *infelicissime audaces*. Here is a passage from the English *Davideis*:

Samuel himself did God's rich Law display:
Taught doubting men with judgment to obey:
And oft his ravish'd soul with sudden flight
Soar'd above present Times and human Sight.

And here is a part of it as he renders it into Latin:

Temporis ingreditur penetralia celsa futuri
Implumesque videt nidis coelestibus annos.

"And sees in heaven's nests the fledgling years." Cowley might manage a conceit like this in English verse, but *implumes annos*,—this will never do! Warton says that it will not, and he has the right feeling.¹⁹ One gets used to Cowley's audacities, and once admitting them, reads on with an illegitimate delight. Know the

¹⁸ *Silvae* ii, 7, 76.

¹⁹ *Poems upon Several Occasions . . . by John Milton*, 1785, pp. xv ff.

context, and you will not object to another verse which, rather comically, roused Warton's wrath:

Hauserunt avide Chocolatam Flora Venusque.

Who will not be grateful for Cowley's description of fleas as "hopping points incarnate"?²⁰ Or what wife will not applaud the scholar who takes to heart the maxim displayed in the neat verses

Bibliotheca fuit paucis decorate libellis
Non onerata malis?²¹

But in general Cowley's Latin verse is crude. Diverse elements are not fused; they are heterogeneous lumps, not worked into the substance of the verse. Passages will be found in Milton, for instance in the little epic on Guy Fawkes, quite as ethereal as Cowley's lines on the fledgling years, but harmoniously antique. He can also be antique and contemporary in the same instant. When he wishes to praise Queen Elizabeth, she is not mentioned by her barbarian name, but the reader recognizes her as "the Amazonian virgin who there rules of late":

Thermodoontea nuper regnante puella.

Especially fine is the sesquipedalian epithet filling half of the verse in Ovid's manner. This is from the poem on Guy Fawkes, which despite certain lapses in taste and a lob-sided arrangement of the matter is a mature affair. The quality of the satire on the Church of Rome is of a vigor unapproached even in *Lycidas*, and more effective than that in *Lycidas* from its indirectness. Antique flavor becomes most appropriate in a description of Romish rites; they are made Pagan in keeping with the Latin convention, with the delicately ironical implication that they are Pagan anyway. Verily this is a two-handed engine, ready to strike once and strike no more. To illustrate, Milton has described the flight of Satan over the Alps on his way to pour insidious suggestions into the ears of the Pontiff. He reaches the city, and²²

Soon he stood on the citadel of Mars-born Quirinus, in the dubious twilight. Through the great city the Triple-Crowned was going in pro-

²⁰ *Plantarum Libri i, Absinth.* 81: *vitae salienta puncta.*

²¹ *Davideis* 828.

²² Cambridge Edit., p. 348.

cession, borne on the shoulders of men, and carrying the bread-made gods. Kings bowed the knee before him; long lines of begging brothers bore in their hands wax tapers,—blind souls all, born and bred in Cimmerian darkness! Soon they entered the temples which shone with their many torches ('twas Peter's sacred eve), and the voices of the singers filled the hollow domes and vacant spaces with noise like the howling of Bacchus and his crew, when they hymn their orgies on Theban Aracythus, while Asopus trembles astonished in his glassy waves, and Cithaeron afar off answers from his hollow cliff.

This is Pagan enough. That is the irony of it, enforced by the concealment of what this festival is. We read for some distance till a brief and stinging parenthesis tells us. Then all that can be heard is the howling of Bacchanalian votaries on the slopes of Cithaeron.

The best of the Latin poems, according to Masson, is the pastoral lament for Milton's friend Charles Diodati, the *Epitaphium Damonis*, "beyond all question," Masson says, "the finest, the deepest in feeling, of all that Milton has left us in Latin, and one of the most interesting of all his poems, whether Latin or English."²³ Whether all readers would agree with this estimate or not, Milton took Latin poetry seriously enough to write it in his thirty-first year, two years after *Lycidas* saw the light. Both the theme and the form are the same, a lament in pastoral for the death of a beloved friend. And still more striking, the grief is now more intense. For there is no question that although his affection for Edward King, whom he had mourned in *Lycidas*, is strong, Charles Diodati had been the very half of his heart, *dimidium animae*. There was thus every inducement for the poet to express his sorrow in the most sincere way; and he chose a pastoral lament in Latin. He had been in Italy again, and the two friends had exchanged Latin verses in the old days. But these are minor considerations. They might excuse the selection of Latin as a medium, but they cannot account for the poem, which is its own justification.

The *Epitaphium Damonis* is one of the later Latin poems. Most of them were written before Milton was twenty-five. If these productions be matched with the poems which Virgil had written at this age, before he had started the *Bucolics*, the palm might well be awarded to Milton. The little epic on Guy Fawkes,

²³ *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, II (1874), p. 374.

the work of the author's seventeenth year, shows greater poise and firmness than the little epic on the *Gnat* which Virgil wrote at sixteen; if anyone doubts that Virgil could have written so learned an affair at such an age, he has only to turn to the early verse of Milton. Of course Milton had the advantage of studying the mature Virgil, and the mature Ovid. But even so, it is something of a feat for a British lad to skip over the centuries and vanquish young Virgil on his own field.

In the verdict of posterity, it is of course the English poems, the *Hymn on the Nativity*, *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso*, *Comus* and *Lycidas* that overtop anything that the youthful Milton wrote in Latin. To us his Latin verses are experiments, since to us, for good or ill, Latin is no longer a natural medium of expression, and indeed, when it is pursued at all, is but a brief endeavor and a fleeting memory in the experience of most college men. Yet even on the assumption that Latin poetry was for Milton merely an incident in his training, something is to be said for such a training, when, though unaccompanied by a course in English composition, it enabled a lad of seventeen to write, with the liquid ease of Swinburne,

O fairest flower, no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken primrose fading timelessly,
Summer's chief honour, if thou hadst outlasted
Bleak Winter's force that made thy blossom dry—

and only four years later,

This is the month, and this the happy morn,
Where in the Son of Heaven's Eternal King,
Of wedded Maid and Virgin Mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring;
For so the holy sages once did sing,
That he our deadly forfeit should release,
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

Apart from the majesty and the surging flow of these lines, their joyousness, their mystic reverence, they reveal a spirit maturely its own master.

I feel, moreover, that to Milton's mind, his Latin verses were as vital as his early poems in English. It is profitable, at any rate, to read the two together. We should take as a whole the volume of poems, both native and foreign, that he published in 1645, and

not, as many modern editors do, relegate the Latin and Italian pieces to an appendix. It is only by studying these productions together that we can understand the poet's temperament at the time.

Milton's imagination, almost from the moment when he began to write poetry, was dominated by the vision of some great work to which he felt himself destined. A great work meant at that time either epic or tragedy. For a Puritan, the choice between the two would seem easy, and though Milton was impressed with the drama at an early age, as we have seen, and though he originally planned a drama on the theme of *Paradise Lost*, and though he wrought out a splendid ancient tragedy in *Samson Agonistes*, his real impulse was to epic. Now the reader of the Latin poems will perceive that the development of his great idea, and its very existence, were due in part to his reading of the ancients. For Virgil had gone through the same process himself. The Virgil of the *Aeneid* is the ultimate and perfected Virgil, and his epic is the ultimate and perfect expression of the Augustan Age. But Virgil was not born in the Augustan Age. His first poetry was produced in the atmosphere of Alexandrianism, which was the literary habit of the day; elegy and epigram, the minor varieties in general, were in vogue; in the confused and transitional condition of politics there was no place for epic with a large and national scope. Virgil grew with his times, and partly led them. He changed from an Alexandrian into an Augustan; *Bucolics*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* mark the stages in this ascent. Even in the shorter pieces that precede the *Bucolics*, he indicates more than once his dissatisfaction with his present accomplishments and his desire some day to write the best that is in him. Milton could not have failed to know of Virgil's successive plans and triumphs, and of a similar series of aspirations and attainments in Ovid's poetry. Indeed, apology and promise became a literary tradition in antiquity, a fact certain to strike the attention of so intelligent a reader as Milton. Of course any youth can hope to do great things, such as becoming President of the United States, without a knowledge of the ancient habit. But Milton's inborn vision of a distant goal of his endeavor must have been strengthened by his reading of Latin poetry and his practice of its different varieties. Even within the limits of this early period, taking as its farther limit

the writing of the *Epitaphium Damonis* in his thirty-first year, we can note that Ovid sinks more and more into the background, and that Virgil comes to the front.

Milton's progress is not quite identical with that of Virgil, but it shows marked points of contact. Virgil's impulse to epic led him early to plan something national,—something on *res Romanae*, as his ancient biographer says, possibly on the Alban kings, or, if a contemporary subject, on the career of Julius Cæsar.²⁴ The first of Milton's higher themes came to expression in his twenty-first year; it is the poem *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*. This is the work to which he refers in that Christmas poem to Charles Diodati, in which Ovidian banter and Virgilian sobriety are harmoniously combined. What elements enter into the composition of the English poem we will consider in a moment.

The next great plan closely suggests that of Virgil. As Virgil had thought, at least in passing, of an epic on some subject like the Alban Kings, so Milton vows that he will

recall in song the kings of my native land, and Arthur, who carried war even into fairyland.—I will sing the Trojan ships that passed along our Kentish coast, and the old realm of Imogene, Brut's wife, and the ancient chiefs Brennus and Arviragus and Belinus and the colonists who settled in Armorica under British laws.—Oh then, if life is granted me, thou, my shepherd-pipe, shalt hang neglected on the gnarled pine, or changing thy tone, sound a clear British lay.

I have put together parts of two passages²⁵ from different poems, the last being the *Epitaphium Damonis*, which is at once a pastoral lament and a farewell to the pastoral, like Ovid's farewell to the *Amores*. Milton declares that he will either have done with pastoral altogether, or cultivate the native sort,—*Britannicum stridebit*. He knew what he had done in *Lycidas*; he could not go back on that; that is what his pastoral must be, if there were to be any more of it. Whether he intended an English or a Latin epic, we have no means of knowing, though Keightley²⁶ appears to

²⁴ See T. Frank, "Vergil's *Res Romanae*," in *Classical Quarterly*, XIV (1920), pp. 156 ff.; E. K. Rand, "Young Virgil's Poetry," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, XXX (1919), pp. 173 ff.

²⁵ *Sylv.* viii (Manso), 80 ff.; *Epitaph. Dam.* 162 ff.

²⁶ Keightley (*Poems of John Milton*, 1859, II, p. 463), on v. 169: *Tu procul annosa pendebis, fistula, pinu.* "I. e. he will abandon Latin com-

know. It is by no means impossible that the poet had a Latin epic in mind.

In choosing an Arthurian subject for his epic, Milton was helped not only by Virgil's boyish plans, but by their realization in the *Aeneid*. His own ideas as he expresses them here, sound something like a British *Aeneid*; it starts with Troy. Now Milton was of course acquainted with Virgil's preliminary sketch of his epic in the crudely historical form that it took at the time when he was writing the *Georgics*. He declares, in the opening verses of the third book of that poem, that he will erect a temple in honor of Augustus, adorned with carvings that describe his triumphs. The doors of the temple shall bear a battle-scene, in ivory and gold,—the people of the Ganges yielding to Roman arms, the Nile surging with war, and towering columns of ships' beaks. The cities of Asia shall be there, beaten Niphates, the Parthian fighting as he flees, and a double trophy from the distant foes of east and west. There shall be statues, too, breathing images of Parian marble, of the god-descended kings of Troy, Assaracus and Father Tros, and of Apollo, founder of the city. And art will show the fate of enemies within the state; Envy shall cower before the Furies, the harsh stream of Cocytus, the writhing snakes of Ixion, the giant wheel and the rock that never gains the summit. This outline suggests a purely historical and contemporary plot, with an inferno all ready for the hero's foes. As Virgil turned the subject over in his mind, in the slow fashion in which his creative genius moved, the contemporary and historical elements in his epic design sank more and more into the background; the mythical and ideal became the ostensible subject of the poem. His real subject, the majesty of Rome and its mission of peace under a divinely appointed leader, had not changed, but it had acquired a profounder depth and a broader horizon.

This transformation of Virgil's plan and the nature of his final achievement could not have escaped the observant mind of Milton. The spell of Armada days was not over when he formed his design of an Arthurian epic. He had a heroine of Augustan proportions

position, and sing those themes in his native English." But *fistula* does not mean Latin composition; it means pastoral poetry. Perhaps Milton drops some hint elsewhere; if not, Keightley and others are wrong in making v. 169 apply to the Arthurian subjects for epic.

in that Amazonian queen to whom he had paid homage in his undergraduate days. It is conceivable that he intended, not like Spenser, a mirror of the gentleman in the guise of mediæval romance, but like Virgil, a glorification of present-day England in a setting of ancient myth. There is nothing quite so definite as this in Milton's announcement of his plans, but the poet of *Paradise Lost*, who shows in that poem the most intimate acquaintance with the intricacies of Virgil's art, must have had at the age of thirty some inkling of the most obvious characteristics of the *Aeneid*.

Virgil, born to write epic, found the first real outlet for the epic quality of his temperament in the pastoral; he transfuses pastoral with epic; it is almost a new literary type, the epic pastoral. Many tried this rash experiment after Virgil; nobody caught the elusive art till Milton set it forth again in *Lycidas*. *Lycidas* is the best comment on Virgil's *Bucolics* ever made, the best clue to the secret places of their greatness. Understand *Lycidas* and you will understand the *Bucolics*; misunderstand *Lycidas*, denounce its conventions and incongruities as Dr. Johnson did, and you will make similarly unhappy denunciations of the *Bucolics*, as Dr. Johnson did. I have tried,—particularly after what Masson had to say—but I have not been able, to detect the same informing spirit in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, which is rather a return to the mood of Bion and Moschus; there is nothing ignoble in such a feat, only it is not Virgilian; it gives no hint of epic about to be, irrepressible, straining at the leash, as in Virgil's pastorals. Genuine sorrow shines through the artificial setting, but it does not, as in *Lycidas*, transform it. And there is one tremendous infelicity, the refrain:

Go to your folds unfed, my lambs, your master has no time for you.²⁷

This is well enough for three times or even four, but lambs that have to be liturgically shooed away seventeen times are either unusually hungry or unusually inquisitive; at any rate they become unusually monotonous. Milton's resolve to write no more Latin pastorals is quite understandable. He instinctively shrinks from attempting the Virgilian strain in Latin; so in this medium he

²⁷ Ite domum impasti; domino iam non vacat, agni. Mr. Moody by translating "Your master is troubled" somewhat relieves the situation, but more courteously than Milton deserves.

reverts to the Alexandrians. But no new path opens in this direction; if there is need of a pastoral in the future, let it be in the vein of *Lycidas*.

We may now for a moment return to the *Poem on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, often cited, conveniently but unfortunately, as the *Hymn on the Nativity*; it is not a hymn, though it contains what is entitled a hymn. This work is modelled, in a way most interesting to compare with the very different sort of imitation in *Lycidas*, on Virgil's Messianic eclogue. This much-discussed poem—I will speak categorically, as though there were only one view of its nature—is a Birth Song, sung by the Fates upon the advent of a young son and heir in the household of Pollio, in 40 B. C., when Pollio was consul and a happy augury of peace had presented itself to the faction-ridden Roman state. Virgil seizes the event as symbolic of the return of the Golden Age. Ancient prophecy has been fulfilled and the Fates now chant it. The imaginary setting of the poem is the very moment of the birth of the child; as the song ceases, the infant is asked to greet its mother with the happy omen of a smile. Virgil's language reads much like the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, and the poem was eventually interpreted as allegory, not completely understood by its author, of the coming of Christ. Into the history of that interesting misunderstanding we may not enter here, save that to note that it must have been known to Milton.

There is a rude and primitive anticipation of *Lycidas* and of the present poem in a pastoral lament written by Radbertus in the ninth century.²⁸ The work has some merit, particularly in its skilful combination of the imagery of Isaiah with that of the fourth *Eclogue*. This fusion of diverse elements,—incongruities until they are fused—is characteristic of all Humanistic Christian poetry, as we have been noting; it is illustrated by Milton time and again in his Latin poems, and supremely in *Lycidas*. An admirable specimen of this art, like in aim to the *Egloga* of Radbertus but greatly excelling it in execution, is the *De Partu Virginis* of Sannazaro, a poem which had a tremendous vogue in its day and which might well have been known to Milton. Pope constructed his *Messiah* on the same plan.

²⁸ *Egloga duarum sanctimonialium* etc., *Mon. Germ. Hist., Poetae Lat. Aev. Carol.*, III, pp. 45 ff.

But Milton had a different goal in view. His aim is to write a true Messianic eclogue, in which all Pagan dross has been purged away. The main theme is retained. The poet announces a new age, made manifest by the birth of the Holy Child, who has come in the strength of his Father, to work for mankind a perpetual peace,—

pacatamque reget patriis virtutibus orbem.

It is the morn of that happy event; the Magi are on their way with their offerings. The Fates are not to chant the Birth Song, but the poet himself will outrun both Fates and Magi and lay his ode at the Saviour's feet. Then follows the hymn, or rather ode, in which the poet tells the Gospel story of the Birth with its attendant miracles; this he accompanies with his own reflections and his hopes. An age of peace has dawned, yet not the Golden Age; it is not the time for Virgil's prophecy. Calvary no less than Bethlehem is in the destined order of man's redemption. For full and perfect bliss the world must wait until the Judgment Day. The knell of Paganism is sounded. Apollo's oracle is dumb. Sullen Moloch flees, and with him all the false gods of whatever land. Even the huge snaky Typhon hisses away in terror from the Infant's crib.

Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,
Can in his swaddling bands control the damned crew.

Here is perhaps a bit of Pagan coloring,—just a glimpse of the new-born Hercules strangling the serpents in his crib.²⁹

But see the Virgin blest
Hath laid her Babe to rest.

The lines have the sweetness, if not the exact meaning of

Incipe parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem.

In citing these few passages, I have indicated all that is Pagan in the poem. There is almost no allusion save to what the poet wishes to refute. We have here a rare and beautiful kind of imitation. The poet starts with a Classical model; he means us to

²⁹ So at least Keightley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 25:

“He perhaps had the infant Hercules in mind.”

see this; his act is a challenge. To match the Pagan's Messianic prophecy, he has written a pastoral Birth Song for the real Messiah, in which Christian purity and truth dispense with the gaudy trim of Pagan imagery. In *Lycidas*, a Christian subject is decked with all the ornament that reminiscence can bestow,—and the poetry is no less great and true. The poems are like the two statues that Phidias made of the Virgin Athene, one in the goddess's simple attire, the other in her gorgeous panoply. Every Latin poet in the Middle Ages, such as Hildebert of Tours, was master of two styles, the rustic style of epic and elegy, in which ancient rules of vowel quantity were still observed and Classical imitation abounded. Whether or not the youthful Milton was deeply read in mediæval Latin poetry, he has continued one of its traditions.³⁰

In this early period, then, Milton, like the youthful Spenser, like the youthful Virgil, and other youthful poets, too, finds the pastoral a natural medium for his genius. He even tries the masquerade, in *Comus*, most virtuous of pastorals, and with greater brevity and charm, in *Arcades*. He indicates in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, as we have seen, that others still may follow, and that his fame may rest solely on pastorals in his native tongue. But that surmise did not come true; it was not by this path that he proceeded to fulfil his great plan.

The impulse came in another way. The first step, but a step aside, was the abandonment of his cloistered art and his pleasant roamings in Italy, for active participation in an issue that had fired his soul. The good conservative Warton looks on Milton's Puritanic polemics with no kindly eye.³¹ "But surely," he remarks, "these speculations should have been consigned to the enthusiasts of the age, to such restless and wayward spirits as Prynne, Hugh Peters, Goodwyn, and Baxter. Minds less refined, and faculties less elegantly cultivated, would have been better employed in this task:

Coarse complexions,
And cheeks of sorry grain, will serve to ply
The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool:

³⁰ See E. K. Rand, "Prudentius and Christian Humanism," in *Trans. Amer. Philol. Assoc.*, LI (1920), p. 75.

³¹ *Poems, etc.*, p. xv.

What need a vermeil-tinctur'd lip for that,
Love-darting eyes, and tresses like the morn?"

Warton takes his quotation from a dangerous source; he is citing devil-scripture for his purpose. The religious controversy of Milton's day, however unlovely it may appear to us, was life and death to him. It determined his intellectual interests for twenty years and made inevitable his final choice for epic. I cannot go into the complicated series of happenings of which *Paradise Lost* was a natural sequence. It proved to be a personal rather than a national poem,—personal and universal. But it was the course of national events and Milton's participation in them, and his ultimate exclusion from them, that prepared the ground from which flowered the most Classic epic of modern times. In its ostensible theme, it had a long line of precursors; there had been many since the days of Juvencus the Spaniard who had moulded Biblical episodes into Virgilian form. There are passages in Milton's Latin poems which show that he was adept in this art.³² But for the motives that urged him to the new task we must look deeper than his familiarity with Biblical epic,—Latin, French or native. He was not casting about for some literary form that might profitably exercise his genius.

Paradise Lost is the product of an intense, personal experience. It should be studied with certain works written by prisoners and exiles, especially by men who have had the prizes of life suddenly and, it would seem, unjustly, snatched from them, and who grasp desperately for some deeper meaning in life, some spiritual possession of which none may rob them. The weaker spirits surrender to lamentation, the sturdier turn from the world in which all is wrong to that in which all is right. Ovid is one of the weaker exiles; he still shows his old power to create a little world of the imagination and to retreat into this, but for the most part, he sends what Milton called "bad verses" from the shores of the Euxine. Cicero in his actual exile displays the weakest sides of his character; in that still more poignant exile which befell him after his return, his exclusion from power in the state, he turned to philosophy, which had occupied his mind from his youth, as to

³² E. g. the fine description of Sennacherib, with its Virgilian echoes in *Eleg. iv*, 113 ff. and that of Satan, for an anticipation of *Paradise Lost*, at the beginning of *Sylv. ii*.

a substitute for a life brimmed with activities and satisfactions, Bunyan, Sir Thomas More and Dracontius are among the prisoners who merged their individual lots in the high controlling principles of life. Boethius is the noblest exile of them all; the consolation that Philosophy administered to him in his dungeon is the knowledge that Fortune has been kind to him and that his proud soul possesses the real rewards of life, as he says in the great words with which this great work closes, *ante oculos iudicis cuncta cernentis*. And Milton, exiled by his blindness from the physical world,

Imprisoned now indeed
In real darkness of the body,

and banished like Cicero from high functions of state, wastes no moment in regret, but with that mind which is its own place, and surer to prosper than prosperity would have assured him, finds at last his great theme for epic in a theodicy; he will prove that

Just are the ways of God,
And Justifiable to men.

There could be no completer contrast to Virgil's external career than that of Milton. Virgil, while taking no part in the politics of his day, had prophesied the great change in government, had cherished monarchy as the instrument of peace, and had lived to see his dream realized, realized as well as any dream can be. The great work to which his spirit had been growing is the embodiment of this very ideal. Milton's ideal, which originally may have been the same, was rudely shattered by intestine conflict. He grew into a new order, and contributed to it. Poetry made only an occasional appeal to him at the time. He was too much in the thick of events to idealize them. Had the rule of Cromwell proved as stable as that of Augustus, Milton might have magnified it in a Virgilian way, returning to something of his early plan; his harmonious and wonder-working mind might have traced a divinely destined succession from King Arthur to Cromwell. But this was not to be. He had fallen on evil times, on the "Restoration" of all that he had held most wrong. He cannot glorify the present; he turns his eyes from it. Satisfaction he must have, and he seeks it in things divine. As Mr. Paul Elmer More acutely observed,³³

³³ *Shelburne Essays*, iv, p. 243.

Paradise Lost may be regarded as a kind of pastoral, an effort to escape from the bitterness of here and now into the calm of a Golden Age; this does not completely account for the poem; indeed, as its purpose gradually dawns on the reader, pastoral longing, the contemplation of pastoral peace, seems only a tiny strand in the whole fabric. Milton sought ultimate peace not in escape but in fulfilment. His mind still battles and surges with revolt. He is fighting on the Lord's side and beating down his enemies.

But just at this moment, Virgil enters. The new work, the great work, will not be another pamphlet, a *Pro Deo Defensio* to match the *Pro Populi Anglicani Defensio*. It will be an epic, Virgilian in spirit and design. Ancient art is a balm for the wounded soul, and it soothes the poet more and more as the task proceeds. Mr. C. H. Herford, in his preface to Chambers' *English Pastorals* remarks:

In Pastoralism, literary tradition penetrates everywhere, like an atmosphere, softening the asperities of innovation and touching the contours, even of a work fashioned by a Shakespeare or a Milton, with a halo of allusion and reminiscence.

This soothing effect of the traditional art on a poet's natural intensity is not confined to the pastoral. It appears in epic, or in any literary tradition. The Saracens of Ariosto and Tasso lose something of their diabolical temper when they enter the lists in defence of a literary Troy. Who can deny that the Classics were a wholesome balm for Milton's spirit all through his life? Who would not shudder to think what the world might have lost, had not Ovid tempered his youth and Virgil his age? If Milton be considered a typical Puritan,—and we all can frame an unlovely definition of what a typical Puritan was—his dallying with the old poets, who sang unabashed of love and wine and theatres and other themes beyond the Puritanic pale, is itself a kind of rustication. I will allegorically so interpret it, and thus, I hope, appease the reader who may think that I have been rambling from my promised path. Milton came of stalwart stock; his grandfather was as firmly Catholic as he himself was Puritan. Milton's mind was naturally stern, simple, intense, tenacious of purpose, contemptuous of show. Oh happy the day when he became apprentice to the gayest of ancient poets, facile of fancy, fond of banter, audacious

to the point of blasphemy, treating life as a series of metamorphoses, revelling in change. On Milton's temperament Ovid had undoubtedly a limbering effect. Either Milton took seriously his lack of seriousness and seriously imitated it; or if he did not take it seriously, why then he had already brought about a profitable mitigation of his own seriousness.

The Classics were so useful as a scape-goat. The might of tradition made right. Does it seem curious that a Puritan in a threnody on the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge should express the hope that Aeacus will give him an easy sentence, and Proserpine greet him with a pleasant smile? Not when you know that this is the correct habit. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. When writing Pagan verse, turn everything into Pagan,—words, ideas, colors and ultimate beliefs. A long tradition lay before Milton, running back of the Renaissance and not without its witnesses in the Middle Ages.

Ovid also tempts him to banter. He banters delightfully in his Christmas poem to Diodati. There is a subtle tone of banter in his poem on Plato's doctrine of ideas as interpreted by Aristotle.³⁴ Even audacity is easy for Milton with Ovid to guide. What more audacious than the close of his pastoral lament for Diodati, when he describes the apotheosis of his friend in language that applies equally well to the joys of the New Jerusalem and to the frenzy of a Bacchic dance?

Thy bright head crowned with light, and glad palms in thy hand, thou
dost ever act and act again the immortal nuptials, there where singing is,
and the lyre mixes madly with the beatific dance, and the wild orgies rage
under the thyrsus of Sion.³⁵

I also call it audacious to seize a wish from one of Ovid's most unblushing rhapsodies on a golden day with Corinna and apply it to his vision of the dear departed Bishop of Winchester,—

*Talia contingent somnia saepe mihi.*³⁶

³⁴ See Moody's remarks, Cambridge Edition, p. 357.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

³⁶ End of *Eleg.* iii. Cf. Ovid, *Am.* i, 5, 28: *proveniant medii sic mihi
saepe dies.* A similarly daring bit is *Eleg.* v, 8: *poscet opus.* Cf. *Am.*
iii, 7, 68.

And listen to this encomium of the fair Leonora, a noted singer whom he had heard in Rome:

To every man his angel is allotted (believe it ye people!), his winged angel from the ethereal hierarchies. What wonder, Leonora, if a greater glory be yours! For your voice soundeth the present Deity. Either God himself, or surely at least the Third Mind of the insubstantial sky, thrills mysteriously through your throat; thrills, suavely accustoming mortal hearts by tender degrees to immortal sounds. Yes, if all things be God, and He be transfused through all, yet in you alone He speaks, the rest He possesses in silence.⁷⁷

Truly it is only a training in the Classics that could induce a Puritan to fling this theological bouquet at the feet of a prima donna. If he had said this sort of thing seriously, he deserved to be put out of meeting. But, ah, there is the patient scape-goat again, the prescribed imitation of Pagan extravagance in panegyric.

But Ovidian precept leads to another, and somewhat unexpected result, a display of modesty. In the poem on Guy Fawkes Day (*Sylv. ii*), Satan appearing in a dream to his son, the Pope of Rome, contemptuously refers to the English nation, of which the young man felt himself *non minima pars*, as a “barbarous race born under the Hyperborean Pole.” What but an inoculation of Ovidian courtesy, and of Ovid’s fondness of treating himself to a metamorphosis, could have induced Milton to describe himself, in the poem to his Italian host Manso, as a “stranger youth descending from the Hyperborean Pole”?

If the dexterous teacher can work these startling changes, why not one more astonishing still, a homage to the liturgy and organization of the Established Church of England? The Roman poets are all devoted to liturgy, Ovid no less than the rest. In their spirit, Milton dedicates a poem of lament to each of two lately deceased Bishops, poems of a reverential cast, suggestive of solemn choirs, sacred lights and a stately Apostolic succession. Just look at the ancient magic! The fact that a Bishop had died would not ordinarily induce a youth of Puritanic tendencies to grace his obsequies with a poem; but if the youth is also a disciple of Ovid and Horace, casting about for a mete subject for ode or elegy, he

⁷⁷ Cambridge Edit., p. 344.

might, without straining conscience, devote a Latin lament to the distinguished man, Bishop though he be. I would not imply that Milton's praise is insincere. I have also not forgotten that Milton was less anti-Episcopal at the time than later. I mean merely that prelacy with a seasoning of the Classics is more palatable to a Puritan than without.

Shall I now add, to make the *reductio ad Ovidium* complete, that Milton received his asceticism from Ovid? Ovid is ascetic to the point of vegetarianism,—not always, perhaps, but when he is talking of Pythagoras, whose doctrine of the transmigration of souls is kept by the poet for his final book as the most impressive of all metamorphoses. So the sacred poet, Milton declares,³⁸

must live sparingly, after the manner of Pythagoras, the Samian teacher. Herbs must furnish him his innocent food; let clear water in a beechen cup stand at his side and let his drink be sober draughts from the pure spring.

Let this suffice. We have boxed the compass, and with a sudden and Ovidian metamorphosis, reduced Milton to sobriety again. He has returned from rustication. It has been a wholesome experience. Perhaps I am going too far, but at least I can imagine that if it had not been for his intense love of the ancient poets and his profound reading and skilful rewriting of them, if it had not been for this pleasant rustication in a world alien to Puritanic thought, the talented scholar and ardent theorist might have performed the same services in defence of the new government and left the world the same series of sturdy polemical tracts, but never have expressed his final estimate of life in the solemn and liturgical music, the calm and strife-transcending thought, the sympathetic and dramatic characterization and the thoroughly Virgilian imagery of *Paradise Lost*.

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³⁸ Cambridge Edit., p. 344.